



## News Release

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**Media Contact:**  
Norman Thurston  
801-538-7052

### **Modest Increase in Utah's Uninsured**

*Increase found primarily among children under age 18.*

SALT LAKE CITY - According to the most recent official estimates released today by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Utah Health Status Survey (UHSS), there was an increase in both the number and percentage of Utahns who were uninsured from 2005 to 2006. However, the increase (11.6 to 11.9 percent) was smaller than in recent years.

The 2006 survey estimated that 306,500 Utahns lacked health insurance coverage during calendar year 2006, an increase of 13,700 from the previous year (2005: 292,800). The increase occurred primarily among children ages 0 to 18 (4.7 percent increase from 2005 - 2006).

Utah lawmakers recently took steps to address the rising number of uninsured Children. During the 2007 Utah State Legislative Session, lawmakers appropriated \$4 million to allow another 12,000 children to be insured through the Children's Health Insurance Program or CHIP, a state health insurance plan for uninsured children whose parents' income is under 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Over the last decade, Utah's uninsured population grew at an average annual rate of 6.9 percent, compared with 2.3 percent for the state's overall rate of population growth. The increase in uninsured from 2005 to 2006 was less than in previous years, and did not reach statistical significance. "The increase was not as large, but we're still going in the wrong direction," said UDOH executive director, Dr. David N. Sundwall.

Who was at greater risk for lacking insurance?

- Overall, males and females were equally likely to lack health insurance coverage.
- Fifty-two percent of working-aged adults without a high school diploma lacked health insurance making them significantly more likely than other adults to be uninsured.

## Page 2 of 2 – Modest Increase in Utah’s Uninsured

- Utahns who were of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity were significantly more likely than others to lack health insurance (36.4% and 8.7% respectively).

Among Utahns who had insurance the majority received it through a current or former or employer or union (78.7 percent). Although this percentage has increased slightly since 2005 (77.5 percent), it remains relatively stable. The percentage of persons receiving insurance through Medicare or CHIP has increased slightly, while the percentage of persons receiving insurance through Medicaid and other government plans has decreased slightly. Having health insurance does not guarantee access to good medical care - among persons who were insured, 12.6 percent reported difficulties accessing care.

Uninsured Utahns were less likely to have had a usual source of medical care (66.9 percent vs. 93.3 percent for those with coverage) or a routine medical visit in the last year (54.4 percent vs. 71.6 percent for those with coverage). Utahns who lacked health insurance were also more likely to seek primary care from an emergency department or urgent care center (12.4 percent vs. 6.7 percent).

Factors contributing to the increase in uninsured Utahns include a decreasing percentage of employers offering health insurance, the cost of insurance premiums to employers, employees, and individual purchasers, rising costs of health care locally and nationally and general economic conditions affecting individuals and businesses.

The UHSS is a statewide household survey conducted by the UDOH to measure health insurance status and health care access on an annual basis. It is representative of the non-institutionalized Utah population living in households with telephones. For a copy of the Utah Health Status Update *Uninsured in Utah 2006*, visit:

[http://ibis.health.utah.gov/home/opha\\_publications\\_chron.html](http://ibis.health.utah.gov/home/opha_publications_chron.html)

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*The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.*